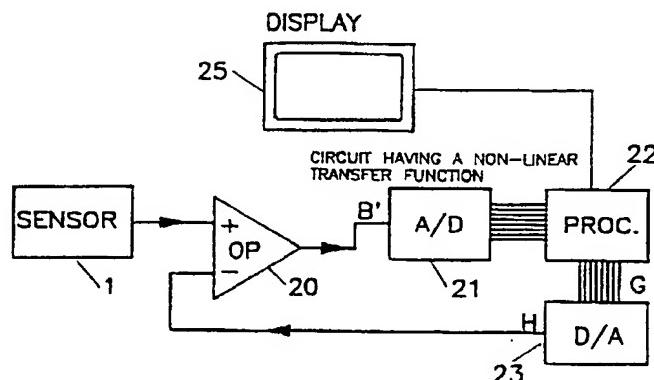




INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION PUBLISHED UNDER THE PATENT COOPERATION TREATY (PCT)

(51) International Patent Classification 5 : H04N 5/32, A61B 6/14 H05G 1/64		A1	(11) International Publication Number: WO 93/23952 (43) International Publication Date: 25 November 1993 (25.11.93)
(21) International Application Number: PCT/SE93/00404			(81) Designated States: AT, AU, BB, BG, BR, CA, CH, DE, DK, ES, FI, GB, HU, JP, KP, KR, LK, LU, MG, MN, MW, NL, NO, PL, RO, RU, SD, SE, US, European patent (AT, BE, CH, DE, DK, ES, FR, GB, GR, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PT, SE), OAPI patent (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).
(22) International Filing Date: 7 May 1993 (07.05.93)			
(30) Priority data: 9201482-8 11 May 1992 (11.05.92)		SE	
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(54) Title: METHOD FOR COMPENSATION OF DARK CURRENT OF CCD-SENSOR IN DENTAL X-RAYING



(57) Abstract

The present method and device according to the invention is by a compensation signal to guarantee that picture element within preferably faintly exposed image areas in dental x-raying will be located within a desired signal level interval, which on a video monitor (25) is corresponding to the light intensity which should have been obtained with a dental x-ray film, to thereby on the video monitor (25) facilitate improved dynamics and thus obtain maximum imaging sensitivity for gray level variations, e.g., enamel and dentine in dental x-raying. Additionally is achieved that the strong dependence of the image sensor to, e.g., ambient temperature regarding its dark current is compensated by a signal processing device (20, 23) already upon generation of raw data for the image to thus utilize maximum possible image quality and resolution prior to subsequent processing by a processor (22) by means of a non-linear digitalization (21).

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Method for compensation of dark current of CCD-sensor in dental X-raying
Technical field

The present invention relates to a method to obtain a display obtaining a curve of luminous flux corresponding to a photographic film when using an image sensor formed by a CCD member (Charge Coupled Device) instead of x-ray film for dental x-raying and more exactly to a method for compensation of dark current in the use of a CCD member for dental x-raying due to the CCD member having a strongly temperature and integration time dependent dark signal.

Prior art

In dental x-ray examinations small pieces of photographic film encapsulated in what could be called a cover to protect the film to light have for a long time been used, whereby said cover was being brought into the oral cavity. This film particularly adapted for exposure by x-ray radiation is in darkness developed after exposure and removal of the cover in a normal way, whereby an image is obtained where e.g. the jawbone and teeth will appear lighter in the film than for example soft tissues due to the difference in material density.

Today according to prior art the photographic film is replaced by electronic image sensors, usually in form of an image sensor of a CCD type (Charge Coupled Device). Such image sensing members are also frequently to be found in e.g. video technique but are then meant to especially operate within the wavelength range of visual light. The technique implies that immediately after the exposure with x-ray radiation a corresponding image is obtained for example on some type of display and thereby one avoids all of the developing process simultaneously as the radiation dose in most cases essentially is decreased due to that the image sensor itself may sense the necessary radiation dose to obtain the sufficient exposure. Such a system for dental x-raying named SEN-A-RAY is marketed for example by Regam Medical Systems AB, Sundsvall.

When these images produced by the previously used dental x-ray film were evaluated, this was done by permitting light from behind to fall through the obtained image. The darkening of the film may be expressed by the optical density D as a function of the light intensity I_1 , reaching the eye relative to the light intensity I_0 falling in.

$$D = (\text{optical density}) = 10 \log I_0/I_1$$

In a dental film D is basically proportional to the exposure dose. If one thereby, according to Fig. 2, draws a graph of the light intensity as a function of the optical density D a nonlinear curve having the largest slope at high material densities of the object within the interval marked by a in Fig. 2 is obtained, i.e. the areas in the exposed film corresponding to enamel and dentine. Thus it desirable that the intensity curve within this density range is as steep as possible to be able to discriminate small changes in e.g. the enamel of a tooth.

In the case of a CCD sensor an intensity value is obtained, which is proportional to the exposure, and primarily the film and the sensor in this respect have equal qualities. Upon the presentation of the signal from such a CCD sensor is generally obtained a visualization where the relation between intensity of light on the display and D will be a linear function, as is exemplified in Fig. 3. But simultaneously as a high resolution of gray levels within the area comprising e.g. the enamel of a tooth is desired, also still a resolution is desired at high optical densities corresponding to portions more opaque to the x-ray radiation, to e. g. clearly be able to indicate an eventual root infection and the like, why the problem is not simply solved only by making the linear function steep within a limited density interval. Accordingly an image having the linear intensity imaging does not to the user appear quite similar compared to film images and may sometimes result in certain interpretation difficulties, why it is desirable to be able to present image data also on a video monitor having the logarithmic or non-linear curve of Fig. 2.

By utilization of different technical methods it is of course possible by hardware or software to transform the image from the CCD sensor presented at the display screen to have a corresponding non-linear relation between the intensity of light an the density of the imaged object. By such a method a transfer function may be obtained which offers a steep slope i the y-direction within a certain desired interval along the x-axis of the graph.

Anyhow, one difficulty in this case is to be able to ensure that the steep portion of the curve really falls within the interesting influenced interval as the reference point or starting point of the curve is not fixed due to that the dark current of the CCD sensor is highly dependent of e.g. the surrounding temperature and the integration time as it is necessary to operate in a temperature interval between about 20°C and 37°C, whereby thus the temperature of the sensor will vary between a temperature higher than room temperature and higher than the body temperature about 37°C due to its own power dissipation and dependent of how much heat for example is transferred to the CCD cell within the oral cavity during the preparations before and also during the exposure and which at each different occasion for example is dependent of how the encapsulating of the CCD device transmits the environment temperature as well as how it makes contact to tissue and how exhalation air will affect the sensor. The necessary dose and consequently also the integration time will also vary from exposure to exposure because different objects require more or less dose to be penetrated. Thus, the integral of the dark current, the dark signal will be strongly dependent on both temperature and integration time.

In a document US-A-4 628 357 is disclosed a digital fluorographic system for the display of images of objects wherein by base line clipping an improvement is affected in the circuitry for log amplifying the video signal from a camera. However this is not intended for a single direct frame from a CCD cell and utilizing fixed settings and clipping will not be a proper way to handle

varying dark signal to obtain maximum sensitivity for faintly exposed areas of an image.

In another document US-A-4 467 351 is disclosed a way to decrease the dose by deliberately underexposing the image on a film, an X-ray intensifier or the like and by means of a television camera enhancing the contrast by means of a digital imaging processor. The television camera then operates in a normal mode and does not produce only one single frame and here there are no measures taken regarding a possible dark signal which is highly dependent of the operating temperature as well as the integration time, which in the case of a CCD sensor for dental x-ray will be in a critical important range.

Thus there is an obvious need to be able to control the influence of the dark signal on the starting point of the graph within the most interesting interval (marked by a in Fig. 2) of the contrast curve shown in Fig. 2 in the use of a CCD sensor. According to prior art this should normally be created by a simple transformation of the already digitized image signal by any suitable transfer function and eventually by means of a fixed compensation. A much better way should be to already from start dynamically depending on a precalculated dark signal component influence and lock the image signal within the correct amplitude interval before digitalization and thereby facilitate a further improved dynamics within the range of interest.

Description of the invention

A purpose of the present invention is by a method and a corresponding device to solve the problem to from an x-ray electronically detector generated image displayed on a video monitor primarily obtain a curve of the intensity of light which corresponds to the curve of intensity of light obtained by means of ordinary film for dental x-raying which film is illuminated from behind.

An additional purpose of the method and the device according to the present invention is by a dynamically precalculated correction signal to obtain that the signal levels of the image elements within preferably weak exposed imaging areas do fall within a desired signal level interval of the curve of light intensity to thereby facilitate an improved dynamics and then obtain maximum imaging sensitivity for, e.g., enamel and dentine in dental x-raying.

A third purpose of the method and the device according to the present invention is to by this obtain that the image sensor strong dependence of e.g. ambient temperature regarding its dark current, exposure time and own power dissipation, is compensated already upon creation of raw data for the image before the subsequent processing of this signal data to thereby make use of maximum possible image quality and gray level resolution.

Description of the drawings

The invention will be described in preferred embodiments by means of the attached drawings and in which:

Fig. 1 is the principle of an incident light intensity on a film and the corresponding viewed outgoing light intensity,

Fig. 2 an exemplifying relation between light intensity and optical density in evaluation of dental x-ray images,

Fig. 3 a typical relationship between light intensity and signal level of an image generated by a CCD sensor and presented on a linear video monitor,

Fig. 4 an example of transmission of analog signals from an image sensor via a device having a non-linear transfer function,

Fig. 5 an example of transmission of analog signals from an image sensor via a non-linear A/D converter,

Fig. 6 an example of transmission of analog signals from an image sensor via a linear A/D converter having 12 bits and conversion of the value into a non-linear digital function by reading tabulated values from a memory,

Fig. 7 an embodiment of an A/D converter having a possibility of changing linearity within four signal level intervals,

Fig. 8 an embodiment of a device according to the invention to compensate dark signal of an image sensor,

Fig. 9 an additional embodiment of a device according to the invention to compensate the output signal of an image sensor for dark current.

Embodiments of the invention

In figure 4 is in principle demonstrated by an embodiment how the output signal of an image sensor 1 is processed to obtain a desired non-linear relationship between the light intensity on a display and the signal level, for example according to the graph of Fig. 2. The signal from the image sensor 1 will pass a unit 2 having a non-linear transfer function, e.g. according to a logarithmic curve, before the signal according to the example is digitized by means of an A/D converter 3 to be further processed, before the image is presented on a suitable video monitor. In the most simple embodiment the display in principle is connected directly after the unit 2 via only a suitable interface.

The unit 2 in the embodiment of Fig. 4 is constituting an analog logarithmic amplifier. The logarithmic or non-linear transfer function is possible to obtain according to prior art in a

multitude of ways, e.g., by means of combinations of diodes and resistors in a feedback loop and will not be explained here as the construction of that does not constitute any part of the invention as such.

Figure 7 shows more detailed an embodiment of an A/D converter suitable for use as the A/D converter 3 of the embodiment according to Fig. 4. The A/D converter according to this principle relies on a voltage divider having for example 256 different resistors $R_0 - R_{255}$, which from a voltage reference V_{REF} generates 256 different stepwise voltage levels which each is fed to one input terminal of a corresponding comparator K1 - K256. The analog signal B from each picture element achieved by the image sensor 1 is fed into the other input terminal of each comparator K1 - K256. All comparators for which the input voltage B of the other input terminal exceeds the reference voltage at the first input terminal of the comparator give a logic level out, for example a "one", while the comparators for which the input voltage B of the other input terminal does not exceed the reference voltage of the first input terminal give out a logic "zero". The advantage of having all the comparators working simultaneously causes the analog-to-digital conversion to be fast. Via a gate circuitry this thus digitally represented value is translated into a binary number having for example 8 bits as in the embodiment and which binary number in a simple way may be handled by a processor, for example, in form of a personal computer. To be able to convert each picture element separately the ordinary clocking signals for the image sensor is used according to the state of the art to also synchronously control the gate circuit 10 such that a digital 8 bit word is transferred out for each picture element being fed into the input terminal B.

In figure 5 is demonstrated in another embodiment how the output signal from the image sensor 1 is carried directly to an A/D converter 4 which is having a non-linear transfer function, i.e., it applies different sizes of amplitude steps to the digital

representation of the picture elements signal upon the transmission from the image sensor 1.

An A/D converter according to Fig. 5 may be realized e.g. by making the resistors $R_0 - R_{255}$ different whereby the comparator steps K1 to K256 will represent voltage steps which do not have the same step size in the conversion to the binary number in the embodiment having 8 bits. In the embodiment the circuitry shown in Fig. 7 constitutes one single component and then the different resistance values $R_0 - R_{255}$ may not simply be changed. Anyhow this integrated component is available having extra terminals C, D and E at the resistors R_{63} , R_{127} , and R_{191} , respectively corresponding to 1/4, 1/2 and 3/4 of the resistance ladder. By parallel connection of a suitable resistor over each of the terminal pairs A - C, C - D, D - E, and E - F respectively a non-linear transfer function for the A/D conversion is achieved which demonstrates four different intervals having different slopes for the graph of the relationship between radiation intensity and signal level in the application shown in Fig. 5.

Fig. 6 shows another alternative embodiment of the A/D converter in which a linear A/D converter 5 is used equivalent with the A/D converter 3, but preferably having a larger number of bits to obtain a satisfactory step resolution. The digital word obtained at the output terminal of the A/D converter 5 is used as an address to a memory 6 containing a table by means of which the values obtained from the converter 5 are translated into 8 bits data words, according to a logarithmic scale or any other suitable non-linear function, corresponding to what is achieved in the embodiment according to Fig. 5.

Fig. 8 shows an embodiment of a total system according to the present invention. Analog image signals from the image sensor 1 are fed via a first input terminal into a device 20, which in this embodiment is constituting an operational amplifier. An output signal B' from the device 20 is further fed into an A/D converter 21. The block 21 represent in principle, for example,

any of the embodiments shown in Fig. 4 to Fig. 6. The output signal from the block 21 in the form of a digital word, in the demonstrated embodiment having 8 bits, is fed to a processor 22. In the embodiment the processor is a personal computer provided with a video monitor 25 on which the finally processed image is presented. The processor precalculates and weights a correction signal G which in digital form is fed to a D/A converter 23. In the D/A converter the digital correction signal is converted into an analog correction signal H, which is fed into a second input terminal of the device 20 and which adds this to or alternatively subtracts this feedback signal H from the signal from the image sensor 1 dependent on which is applicable.

While the image sensor 1 is standing by it is, according to known technique, continuously emptied of charges caused by the dark current resulting in its different picture element first of all due to the relatively high ambient temperature of the order 20 - 37°C. In the processor thereby is precalculated a measure of this offset to which the device 20 should be set to compensate this dark signal such that a totally unexposed picture element should be exactly at the beginning of the signal level range marked by a in Fig. 2. By means of the multitude of picture element in the image sensor an image is integrated during the exposure of the image sensor by x-ray radiation simultaneously as the processor 22 calculates a further supplementary correction to the feedback signal H to the device 20 dependent of the exposure time starting from the previous established dark current correction, such that the least exposed picture elements will subsequent be just at the beginning of this interval a which is having the steepest gradient in the relationship between signal level and material density to thereby obtain the best possible gray level resolution in the weakest exposed portions which principally correspond to enamel and dentine in the image obtained in connection with the dental examination.

Finally in Fig. 9 is additionally shown another embodiment according to the present invention. The embodiment of Fig. 9 is

demonstrating a solution utilizing the principal technique shown in Figure 6, but having the addition that the processor 22 like the embodiment shown in Figure 8 calculates a correction which is applied to the tabulated transfer function of the function block 32. The A/D converter 31 utilizes in this embodiment like in the block 5 of Figure 6 a greater number of bits than what is finally applied to the processor 22. The tabulated corrected transfer function is transmitted from the processor 22 to the unit 32 which then preferably is constituting a RAM where the output from the A/D converter performs the memory addressing for the values to be read in the memory 32 and fed further to the processor 22 in form of corrected values for the respective picture element. The combination of memory 32 and processor 22 is additionally also possible to entirely be replaced by software with a suitable processor 22.

In a further different embodiment of the present invention is utilized a conventional linear A/D converter, eventually integrated with the processor, instead of the unit 21 having the non-linear transfer function, whereby the non-linear transfer function is obtained by software for a fast processor 22 according to the method discussed previously in connection with Figure 9.

In the embodiments digital words, e.g., having a resolution of 8 bits, have been utilized, but of course it is possible to use any number of bits, anyhow preferably having a number being divisible by four to, for example, utilize a number of words having four bits. By such a higher contrast resolution having a greater number of bits it is, for example, possible to also present the image by means of pseudo colors, where different color shades eventually more easily could indicate differences in density than a pure gray scale on a display having a certain limited light dynamics. By experience though it has been noted that the black and white presentation so far has proven to be the most effective way of presentation in this application of dental x-ray images.

CLAIMS

1. A method for dental x-ray imaging when utilizing an electronic image sensor (1) in form of e.g. a CCD member which is generating an output signal corresponding to each picture element of the image and which electrically over an interface device is connected to a video display (25) for the presentation of an image generated by the image sensor (1) upon exposure of the sensor with x-ray radiation, characterized in that

the output signal level obtained from said image sensor (1) for each picture element by a non-linear function (21, 32) is transferred into a new signal level for further presentation on the video display (25), said new signal level being compensated to correspond to a predetermined intensity corresponding to the light intensity which should have been obtained by a dental x-ray film,

by a compensation means (20, 32) the amplitude of the signal from each picture element of said image sensor (1) prior to other signal processing is influenced by the use of a correction signal (H , J) facilitating that the signal values of faintly exposed picture elements are caused to be at the beginning of a desired steep signal level interval ([a] of Fig. 2),

said processor (22) is calculating said correction signal (H , J) prior to and during the exposure with x-ray radiation, whereby said correction signal is made dependent on both the dark signal of said image sensor and the x-ray radiation exposure time of said image sensor.

2. The method according to claim 1, characterized in that by said compensation means (20) the analog output signal obtained from said image sensor is subtracted, alternatively added to said analog correction signal (H) initially corresponding to the dark signal of said image sensor prior to x-ray radiation, such that the signal levels of unexposed picture elements are maintained at the beginning of the steep portion of said signal level interval ([a] of Fig. 2) for maximum imaging sensitivity in the image presented on the video display.

3. The method according to claim 2, characterized in that during exposure of said image sensor (1) with x-ray radiation the output signal obtained from said image sensor by said compensation means is subtracted from, alternatively added to the correction signal (H), which starting from the initial signal is changed in time in response to the time during which said image sensor (1) is subjected to x-ray radiation starting from the established dark signal in said image sensor prior to the exposure with x-ray radiation for adapting the signal level of the faintest exposed picture elements to be at the beginning of the steep portion of said signal level interval to obtain maximum imaging sensitivity for enamel and dentine in a dental x-ray image obtained with said image sensor (1).

4. The method according to claim 1, characterized in that by said compensation means (32) the output signal obtained from said image sensor (1), after A/D conversion of said analog output signal from said image sensor, is digitally compensated by said correction signal (J) which depends on the initial dark current of said image sensor prior to the x-ray radiation and of the time of x-ray radiation such that the signal level of unexposed and faintly exposed picture elements will be at the beginning of the steep portion of said signal level interval ([a] of Fig. 2) for maximum imaging sensitivity on said video display.

5. Device for utilization of the method according to claims 1 - 3, characterized by

transfer means (21) having a non-linear transfer function for the output signal level obtained from said image sensor (1) for each picture element, such that the new signal level is compensated to correspond to the light intensity which should have been obtained by light going through an exposed and developed dental x-ray film,

compensation means (20) in front of said transfer means (21) having the non-linear transfer function to ensure that said new signal level of the faintly exposed picture elements are

compensated to be maintained at the beginning of said desired steep signal level interval ([a] of Fig. 2),

an analog correction signal (H) via a D/A converter (23) controlling said compensation means, said correction signal over the processor (22) being controlled by the dark signal of said image sensor (1) prior to and during the exposure with x-ray radiation, whereby said correction signal is influenced by both the dark current of said image sensor and by the time of exposure.

6. Device according to claim 5, characterized in
that said transfer means (21) having a non-linear transfer function is an analog circuit having a logarithmic or a similar non-linear transfer function.

7. Device according to claim 5, characterized in
that said transfer means (21) having a non-linear transfer function is an analog-to-digital converter having a logarithmic or a similar stepwise or continuous non-linear transfer function.

8. Device according to claim 5, characterized in
that said transfer means (21) having a non-linear transfer function is constituted by an analog-to-digital converter having at least a bit resolution corresponding to the desired digital non-linear transferred signal and a table preferably in form of a digital memory containing the corresponding tabulated values of a stepwise logarithmic or a similar non-linear transfer function.

9. Device according to any of claims 4 to 8, characterized in
that a correction signal (G) is generated by means of a digital processor (22), preferably in form of a personal computer, and via a digital-to-analog converter (23) being transferred to a corresponding analog correction signal (H) which is fed back to said compensation means (20).

10. Device according to any of claims 4 to 9, characterized in

that said correction signal (H) initially upon an exposure of said image sensor with x-ray radiation corresponds to a measure of the dark current and that said processor (22) during the exposure stepwise or continuously controls said correction signal as a function of exposure time such that it will be ensured that the signal level of the picture elements within faintly exposed image areas will be at the beginning of said desired steep signal level interval.

11. Device for utilization of the method according to claims 1 and 4, characterized

by transfer means (32) having a non-linear transfer function for the output signal level via a digitizing mean (31) being obtained from said image sensor (1) for each picture element is compensated such that the new signal level is corresponding to a light intensity which on said video display corresponds to a light intensity which should have been obtained by light going through an exposed and developed dental x-ray film,

by a correction signal (J) ensuring that the signal level for the faintly exposed picture elements will be compensated to be at the beginning of a desired steep signal level interval ([a] of Fig. 2),

in that said processor (22) precalculates said compensation signal (J) prior to and during the exposure of x-ray radiation whereby said compensation signal (J) is influenced by both the dark current of the image sensor and the image sensor x-ray exposure time.

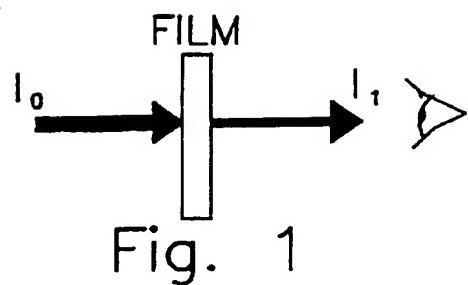


Fig. 1

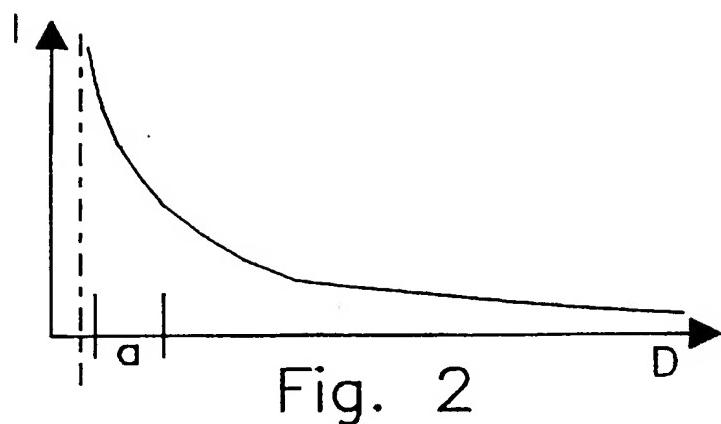


Fig. 2

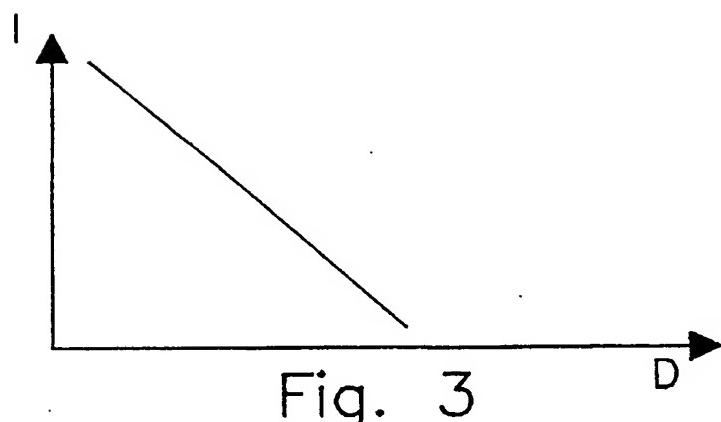


Fig. 3

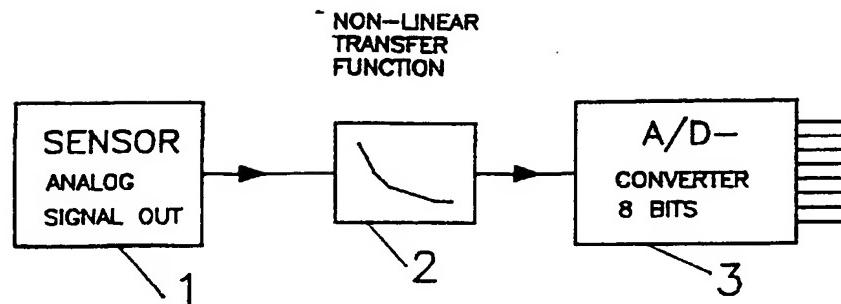


Fig. 4

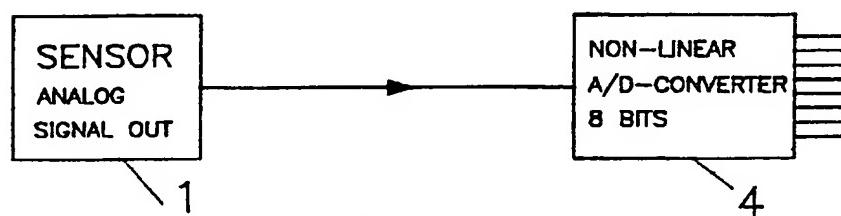


Fig. 5

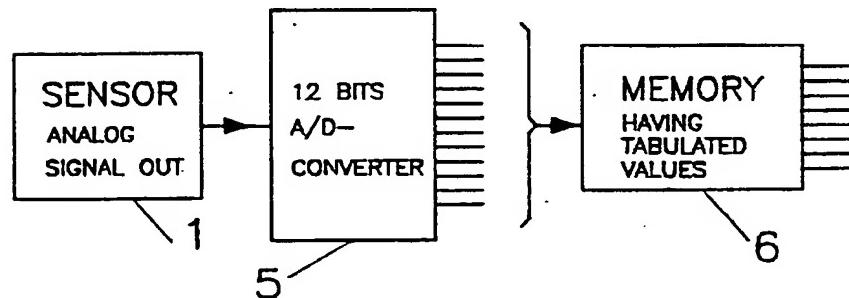


Fig. 6

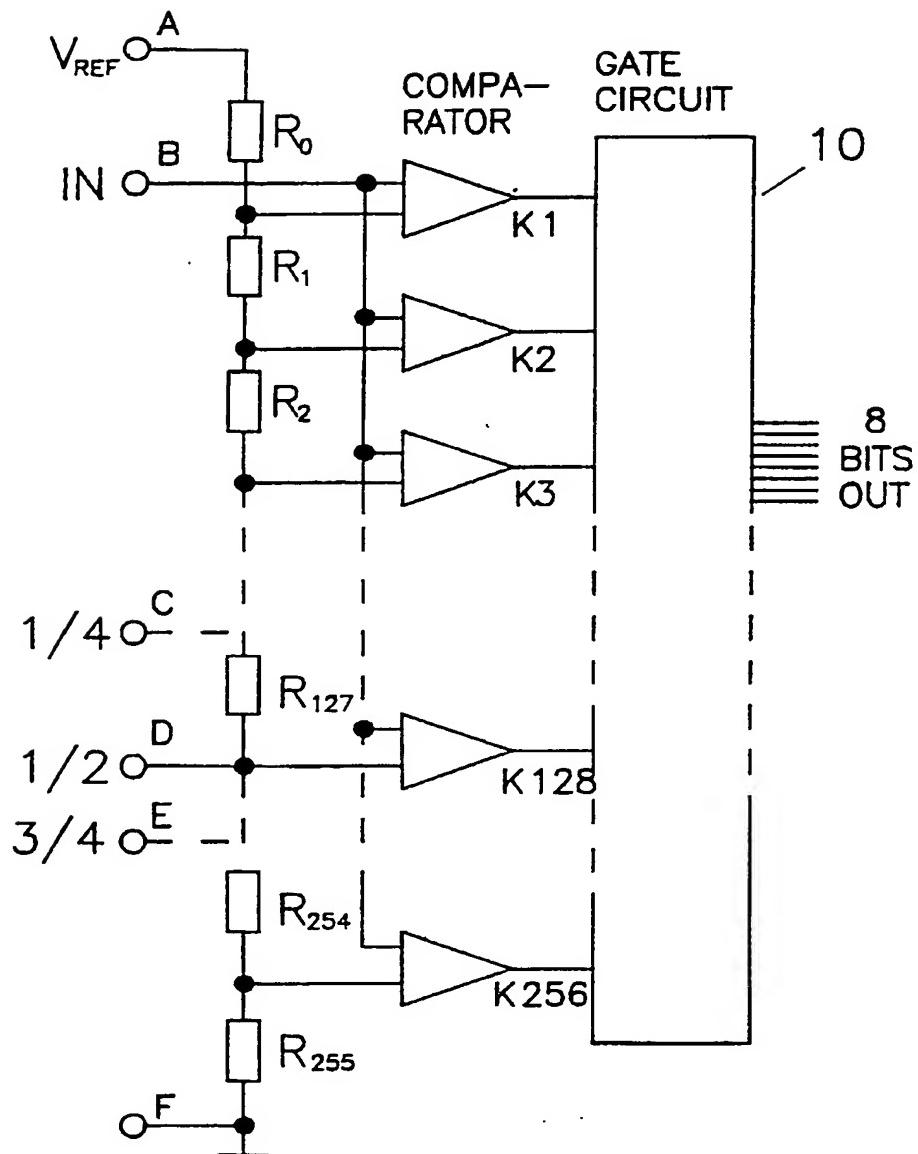
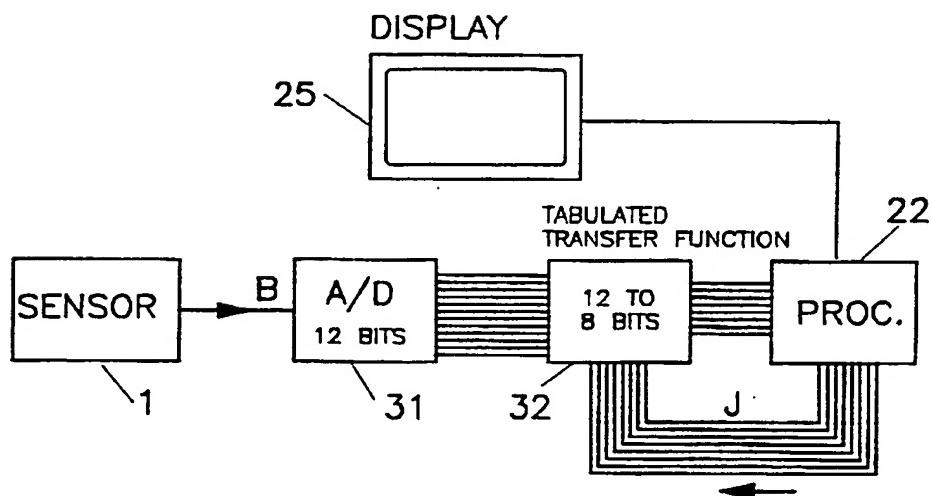
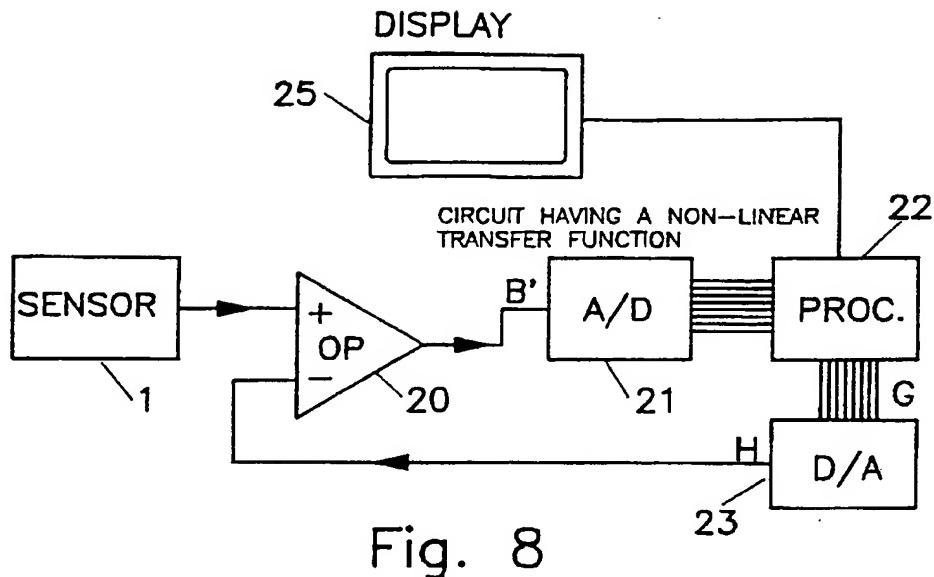


Fig. 7



INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/SE 93/00404

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPCS: H04N 5/32, A61B 6/14, H05G 1/64
 According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

IPCS: H04N, A61B, H05G

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

SE, DK, FI, NO classes as above

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

WPI/L, CLAIMS

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	US, A, 4628357 (PAUL FENSTER), 9 December 1986 (09.12.86), column 3, line 1 - line 31; column 4, line 26 - line 38, figures 1,2	1-11
A	US, A, 4467351 (YEN WANG), 21 August 1984 (21.08.84), column 5, line 21 - column 7, line 57, figures 4-9	1-11
A	EP, A1, 0415075 (SIEMENS AKTIENGESELLSCHAFT), 6 March 1991 (06.03.91), see the whole document	1-11

Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. See patent family annex.

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Date of the actual completion of the international search	Date of mailing of the international search report
11 August 1993	13 -08- 1993
Name and mailing address of the ISA/ Swedish Patent Office Box 5055, S-102 42 STOCKHOLM Facsimile No. +46 8 666 02 86	Authorized officer Bertil Ljungdahl Telephone No. +46 8 782 25 00

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

02/07/93

International application No.

PCT/SE 93/00404

Patent document cited in search report	Publication date	Patent family member(s)		Publication date
US-A- 4628357	09/12/86	DE-A-	3503739	19/09/85
		FR-A-	2559632	16/08/85
		JP-A-	60203081	14/10/85
		NL-A-	8500348	02/09/85
US-A- 4467351	21/08/84	NONE		
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